

Town Transfer Station: Not Your Ordinary Dump

By ELLEN SHEIL

Duxbury school children aren't the only ones in town who worry about report cards. The town transfer station gets one, too. Earlier this year it earned an "A" and a letter from Trudy Coxe, Massachusetts State Secretary for Environmental Affairs, for its recycling efforts. In fact, the transfer station earned this grade not only through the efforts of a dedicated staff and Dept. of Public Works Director Walter Tonaszuck's efforts, but from town residents as well who have enthusiastically sorted cans, washed bottles, separated newspapers, and sorted plastics in support of recycling.

Not surprisingly, Tonaszuck is proud of the fact that over 34 percent of the waste stream in town is recycled. "People may not realize that recycling actually lowers the cost of waste disposal. Recycling helps not only because there's less waste, but because there's actually a market for recycled products out there." He added, "The idea behind recycling is 'avoided cost,' and it can reduce taxes and eliminate a lot of environmental issues."

Markets for recycled goods follow the laws of supply and demand. "Years ago, we used to make money on recycled newspapers," Tonaszuck said. "Now when we haul it away, we end up paying \$25 a ton. In general, though, we make something on almost all the recyclables over time."

Glass, for instance, can be sold for \$5 a ton, which when saved from hauling fees might result in a savings of \$100,000 in the course of year.

Duxbury was early in its establishment of a transfer station. In 1976, the town's landfill, located off Mayflower Drive, had to be closed due to environmental problems. So it's fair to recognize that in Duxbury, recycling began almost 30 years ago. Recyclable items are sold to companies for re-use or new

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applications, and the town collects solid waste in trailers located on the site. The "transfer station" concept refers to the process of trucking the recyclables and refuse out of town to a "resource recovery" facility. Presently, the town uses SEMASS, located in Rochester, for its solid waste disposal. At SEMASS's facilities, waste products are converted to energy. The town has a ten-year contract that expires in 2003, which Tonaszuck noted might mean re-negotiating hauling fees or making the decision to use an out-of-state recovery facility.

Typical recycled items are newspapers, cans, glass, and plastic. Some not-so-typical goods, listed as "Difficult to Manage Wastes or Household Hazardous" on Dept. of Environmental Protection forms, are fluorescent light fixtures, car batteries, used oil, paint, and tires.

Just collecting the recycled items sometimes isn't enough. "Glass must be uncontaminated," Tonaszuck said. "We have to be sure there aren't any metal covers mixed in or we might not be able to sell a whole trailer load. We actually have to handle it three times to be sure it's clean." Labels are okay, but metal rings and tops are not. Returnable cans and bottles with a small cash value are available for fundraising to non-profit organizations by notification and approval of the DPW.

For items that can't be recycled, such as household trash that isn't compostable, there is a large covered "pit" area at the transfer station, where drivers typically back up to toss solid waste into the pit. "We've had some interesting experiences over there," Tonaszuck noted, "mostly skunks in the pit, but every once in a while someone will back up too far, and the car ends up in there." The transfer station can't accept tree stumps, chemicals, or radioactive waste. In spite of the age of some of Duxbury's buildings, "I don't think I've ever seen any asbestos," Tonaszuck said. "Of course, it's a hazardous material, and we would manage it that way."

All of the recycled goods are tracked, and a report is sent to the state with the details, where it is graded and a report card is issued, with copies to state representatives. A view of the report is an education in modern living: Appliances must be hauled away, discarded clothing gathered, and scrap metal and household batteries are just a portion



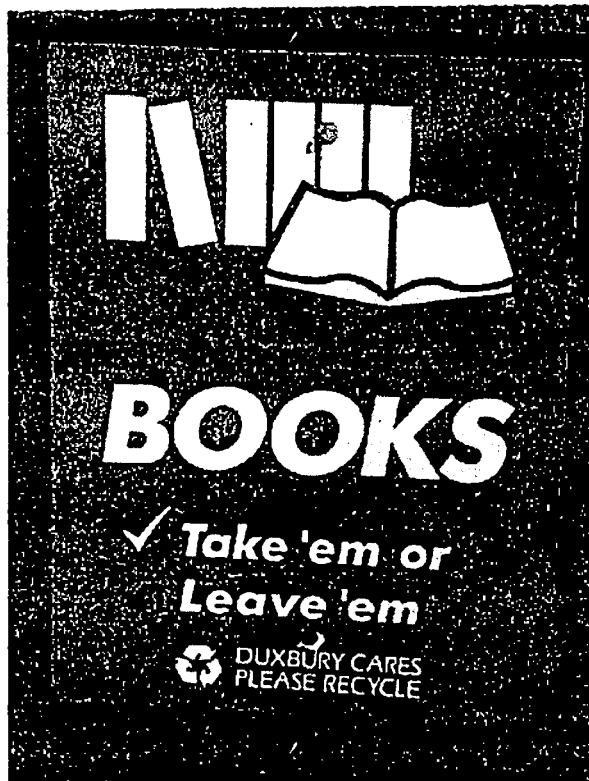
A selection of books are always available at the Transfer Station.

"swap shop" which allows town residents to exchange usable items from their own household for someone else's. Typical swap shop items are used furniture and light fixtures, children's playground equipment, and even sports items in their original boxes. In addition to the "swaps," the transfer station also supports a used book library in the former guard shack where residents can drop off books and pick up new ones. On a recent Sunday morning, titles ranging from bestsellers like Scott Turow's *Presumed Innocent* to Anne Tyler's *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* were grouped together with two full sets of Collier's Encyclopedias, children's books, and an intriguing short paperback titled, *Everything We Wished We Learned in School But Didn't*. Residents were also making selections from a concession area where household goods, fireplace equipment, and even a Singer sewing machine were available for a few dollars. Neighbors greeted each other and wandered through the swap area. One resident collected two scarred wooden chairs for a folk art painting class.

Last year, 5,000 Christmas trees were recycled, and more than 2,000 old tires were salvaged; 250 gallons of used oil was hauled away, and 168 tons of glass was recycled. "People in Duxbury want to do more recycling," Tonaszuck remarked, "This is an exceptional community with a real desire to help the environment." He added, laughing, "I tell everybody about the transfer station. When they move in I tell them to get over there, look around, have fun. Sometimes they leave with more than they came with!"

A permit is required to enter the transfer station, and stickers are available at the Town Hall. Operating hours are Wednesday through Sunday, 8 am-4 pm.

Massachusetts is third in the entire U.S. when ranked according to its rate of recycling, currently 33 percent. The state's goal is to reach a recycling rate of 46 percent by the year 2000. In its support of recycling and recognition of the cost savings and environmental impact, Duxbury is well on its way to being a role model for participation.



Signs direct patrons at the Transfer Station.

Photos by Fran Nichols

of the list. Among the measurements used by the state are the "Elements of Success" which gauge town efforts to provide convenient access to recycling, such as annual mailings or seminars for residents on recycling, whether collection events for gathering hazardous wastes are held, and barring trash haulers from picking up leaves.

One interesting measurement is the provision for a